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ABSTRACT

The Youth Section of the Dallas Police Department has instituted an innovative police diversion project entitled the Youth Services Program as an operational unit of the police department. Fourteen civilian counselors supervised by a police lieutenant function as a diversion unit for arrested juveniles between the ages of 10 and 16. Juveniles that are referred to the Youth Services Program are placed in one of two specific sub-programs. The first sub-program consists of two nightly lectures covering such aspects of the law as juvenile law and the juvenile justice system for first offender misdemeanants. The second sub-program is set up for more difficult juveniles who have had prior arrests and/or are also felons. They undergo a systematic program whereby they are trained on Carkhuff's HRD skills technology on physical, emotional, and intellectual skills which they can apply to home, school, and community problem areas. Parents also receive skills training. The program has been in operation for approximately two years. Statistics show that the program is having a significant impact upon recidivism. The program has also had a significant effect on the juveniles functioning in certain home, school, and community problem areas. (Author/NG)

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DALLAS POLICE DEPARTMENT
YOUTH SERVICES PROGRAM

Police Diversion Program

DALLAS POLICE DEPARTMENT
Youth Section

CG 010 761

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FORWARD

A youth is arrested. A youth is processed through the Criminal Justice System, but is a youth helped so that he does not get into trouble again? Unfortunately, the answer often is "no". The arrest recidivism rate for youths keeps rising. In Dallas, it is approximately 50%. The Juvenile Court System is overburdened and often understaffed resulting in many arrested youths never getting any real tangible help.

In an effort to respond to this situation, the Youth Section of the Dallas Police Department developed a model police-based diversion approach called the Youth Services Program. The program is funded through the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration and is an operational unit of the Dallas Police Department.

After a year's operation (1974), the program has been able to divert a significant number of youths from the overburdened Criminal Justice System and provide needed services for them. The diversion program significantly reduced the arrest recidivism rate of the youths from what would be expected and was able to provide services at a cost below that of existing programs through the Juvenile Court.

This report is to provide a brief description and explanation of the Youth Services Program -- a model police diversion project.

THE YOUTH SERVICES PROGRAM

The Youth Services Program (YSP) is an operational unit of the Youth Section of the Dallas Police Department. It is an integrated program staffed by sworn officers and civilian personnel with a Lieutenant of Police as Director. A complement of behavioral scientists -- one psychologist and fourteen counselors -- have been added to the Youth Section in the form of a Counseling Unit to provide more helping services to youths.

There are two sub-programs to the YSP: (1) the First Offender Program (FOP) and (2) the Counseling Unit. The FOP consists of a three-hour lecture/awareness program conducted by sworn officers for minor first offender youths covering such topic areas as the law, implications of future illegal acts and drug abuse.

The Counseling Unit program is developed for more serious offenders such as repeaters, Impact and other felons as well as misdemeanants and runaways. Each youth referred to the Counseling Unit is assigned a counselor and receives more indepth services to increase his/her physical, intellectual and emotional functioning which appear as the problem areas affecting his/her criminal behavior. Functional skill acquisition is the model.

Besides the two program areas of the YSP, another area of the YSP is in terms of Youth Section operations. Investigators and uniform officers of the Youth Section look at the youth not just in terms of offense but also in terms of what a youth needs to avoid trouble. As such, youth dispositions are of a helping, as well as procedural, nature.

BACKGROUND

In 1973, the Dallas Police Department booked more than 8,290 youths. Seventy-five percent of those youths were referred to the Juvenile Department/Juvenile Court because of a lack of alternatives. The majority of the other 25% were released to parents. In turn, there was a 50% recidivism among youths. Three conclusions could be drawn:

1) An excessive number of youths were unnecessarily referred into the overburdened Juvenile Justice System due to the lack of alternatives.

2) There was a lack of effective alternatives geared to help youths acquire the living, learning and working skills they need to avoid trouble.

3) Positive contacts and programs of a helping nature provided by law enforcement personnel can greatly aid prevention and rehabilitation, especially at the point of arrest.

With these conclusions, the Youth Services Program was developed as a police diversion project. The project has four major goals:

1) Reduce the number of repeat offenders

2) Reduce referrals to the Juvenile Justice System

3) Reduce the number of cases going to Juvenile Court

4) Provide a police-based program at a cost no greater than the normal Juvenile Justice process.

PROCESS, PROCEDURES AND PROGRAMS

When an arrested youth is brought to the Youth Section, the investigator initiates an interview and helping process to determine the needs of the child and the most functional disposition. Time is allocated for the investigator to get a more personal view of the youth. If the youth is referred to the FOP, he/she will receive the three-hour awareness lecture by police officers on two successive nights within one month of arrest.

If the youth is assigned to the Counseling Unit, he/she will be assigned and contacted by a counselor immediately. The counselor will process the youth through a systematic three stage program: (1) The youth first enters an intake stage whereby the counselor assesses the physical, intellectual and emotional needs and problems of the youth. (2) The youth next enters a direct treatment stage whereby the counselor develops either an individual, group or referral program for the youth. The parents of the youth also receive a two-hour orientation and training on how to help their child in the program. (3) The last phase a youth goes through is follow-up. After the direct treatment stage, the youth is given "homework" to follow through in the form of constructive activity participation. For four months the youth returns to his counselor to discuss any problems he might be having as well as review his progress on his physical, intellectual and emotional homework assignments. Throughout the three phases, close communication and cooperation is maintained between referring officer and counselor.

The basic direct treatment mode given to referred youths is the group training program lasting 16 hours. The program systematically teaches the youth the physical (fitness), emotional (relating to others) and intellectual (study/learning) skills needed to be more successful and avoid trouble in home, school and neighborhood problem areas. With an emphasis upon skill acquisition, the youths are learning tangible skills and responses to employ in their lives to avoid trouble, be more successful, and seek self-improvement.

SELECTION AND TRAINING OF STAFF

New staff allocation for the Youth Services Program involved selecting nine police investigators and the psychologist, an analyst and twelve counselors for the Counseling Unit.

The nine police investigators were selected through the normal police personnel selection process. All the civilian positions had to undergo a standard police background investigation as well. While the psychologist and analyst positions were selected by personal interview, the counselor applicants were also screened thru a functional skills inventory. The inventory served to get an index of a counselor's physical, intellectual and emotional skills as helpers. The counselors underwent a four-phase selection process. First level was by background (at least one year's experience and a Bachelors Degree). The second level was by skills inventory with the third level being personal interviews. The fourth phase was background investigation.

All officers of the Youth Section received forty hours of training pertaining to the Youth Services Program. The curriculum was as follows:

1) 30 hours of interpersonal skills to enable the officers to relate more effectively to youth and parents in order to get more personal information relevant for disposition decisions.

2) 5 hours of training on problem-solving and program development to enable the officer to make a more accurate disposition of a youth.

3) 5 hours of training on procedures and materials for implementing the Youth Services Program.

The Youth Section counselors received a total of 250 hours of basic training and orientation over a two-month period prior to the program becoming operational.

1) 24 hours of training devoted to orientation to the Youth Services Program materials and procedures.

2) 32 hours devoted to orientation to the overall Police Department operations and programs.

3) 40 hours devoted to orientation to the Youth Section operations and programs.

4) 32 hours devoted to orientation to the community agencies with which they will be working.

5) 14 hours devoted to orientation to the County Juvenile Justice System and program.

6) 4 hours devoted to an orientation to the juvenile law and Penal Code.

7) 124 hours devoted to basic counselor skills training as follows:
   a) 24 hours - physical training and physical programs
   b) 70 hours - interpersonal-counselor skills training
   c) 15 hours - problem-solving skills
   d) 15 hours - program development skills

Following the basic training and orientation, the counselors are receiving one hour of skills training per week within an in-service program.

RESULTS

From May 6, 1974 - May 6, 1975, the Youth Section of the Dallas Police Department referred 2,282 youths to the First Offender Program of which 1,574 fully participated for a participation of 69%. Referrals to the Counseling Unit by the Youth Section numbered 1,084 of which 813 (75%) fully participated.

The profile for the youths referred to the First Offender Program generally indicate that the typical youth referred is a first offender misdemeanant. The profile of the Counseling Unit referrals is more complex. The average age is 14 with 80% of the youths being boys. In terms of prior record, 59.2% were first offenders and 40.8% were repeat offenders with an average offense record of 1.8. Of the referred youths, 46.6% were felons and 53.4% were misdemeanants with 29.3% being Impact felony offenders.

By providing the YSP programs, the Youth Section has been able to reduce referrals to the Dallas County Juvenile Department (probation) by 10.4% from 72.5% of all arrested youths to 62.1%. This reduced the caseload burden on the Juvenile Department staff and, in turn provided needed services to youths.

Arrest Recidivism

The standing arrest recidivism rate for youths in Dallas is 54%. In 1974. the First Offender Program had an average recidivism rate of 9.6% while the recidivism rate for its control group (N=445) was 15.5%. The recidivism rate for those youths who have completed the Counseling Unit (N=264) is 2.7% with an overall rate for all participating youths of 10.7%. A Counseling Unit control group of 196 youths demonstrated a 36.1% recidivism rate for the same time period.

Petitions Filed

In terms of eventual disposition of repeaters, 16% of all of the control group had petitions filed (55% of repeaters). For the Counseling Unit, only .8% of all youths in the program were filed on (12% of repeaters).

Youth Improvements

While the basic data shows that the YSP significantly reduced recidivism and eventual disposition, the question arises as to why the program reduces these factors. In terms of the First Offender Program, a very important factor is that the lecture/awareness program is very direct and to the point. For the Counseling Unit, the important source of gain is the skills training and the generalization of the skills that the youths make to important outcome areas.

Youths referred to the Counseling Unit were able to significantly increase their physical, intellectual and emotional skills while in the program. In turn, the skill improvement appeared to translate to improved functioning in certain outcome areas. Follow-up parent evaluations on the effect of the YSP counseling program on certain factors that relate to recidivism showed that 74% improved their obedience to parents, 54% accepted more responsibility at home, 63% improved their school attendance, 53% made better grades, 54% studied more, 60% got into less trouble in school, between 43% and 49% were more actively participating in recreation and hobby programs. It was also found that participating youths increased their self-concept, values and positive attitudes toward police.

Cost

With an anticipated yearly referral rate of 1,500 youths the cost per youth is $194 for approximately 25 hours of counseling and training. The cost of serving the same youth if processed through the Juvenile Justice System would be $280/per youth. In turn, re-arrest by police costs $296/per youth with a cost of crime per youth of $920.

CURRENT STATUS

The YSP Counseling Unit is currently attempting to serve more youths (approximately 1,500 per year). An additional two counselors have been hired and new programs are being developed, such as a reading skills program. The YSP is implementing a fireman/counselor program in a cooperative effort, and also is providing active input into the development of needed community resources to serve youths.